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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 000137

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2016
TAGS: PREL, KDEM, HA, TD
SUBJECT: T&T PM MANNING SUPPORTIVE OF HAITI IN CARICOM;
HAITIAN PM PRESSING FOR JEAN-JUSTE RESOLUTION

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 00185

Classified By: DCM, Eugene P. Sweeney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Austin met Interim Haitian Prime Minister Latortue and informed him of the desirability of immediately releasing Father Jean-Juste from prison. Ambassador also asked about the outcome of Latortue's meeting with Prime Minister Manning. Latortue stated that he would call Port au Prince immediately upon arrival in Miami to seek immediate resolution of the Jean-Juste case. Latortue also reported that Manning was supportive of Haiti and wants to help, but Manning's hands are tied by CARICOM recalcitrance. Latortue floated the idea of stationing a U.S. naval vessel near Haiti in the run up to the election to provide a psychological counterweight to the drug and arms runners who are likely to intimidate the population away from the ballot box on February 7. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Ambassador Austin met with Interim Haitian Prime Minister Gerard Latortue (with Poloff as note taker) on January 26 and urged him to seek immediate release of Father

Jean-Juste's release in light of his rapidly deteriorating medical condition. Ambassador also sought to determine the outcome of Latortue's meeting with Trinidad's Prime Minister Manning. Latortue responded that he would call Port au Prince immediately upon arrival in Miami (his next destination) to urge Jean-Juste's immediate release, but noted that the case was now in the Judiciary, where he had no control over it. Latortue also reported that his meeting with PM Manning was productive, with Manning expressing support to bring Haiti back into the CARICOM fold. Latortue made no mention of CARICOM election observers, but did report that CARICOM Foreign Ministers might make a trip to Haiti on February 1, after their January 30-31 meeting in Jamaica.

3. (C) On the Jean-Juste case, Latortue reiterated the information contained reftel, that the Judiciary was ready to bring Jean-Juste to trial and to conclude the trial within a day. If found guilty and sentenced to the minimum six months, Jean-Juste has already served the time. If sentenced to longer, the government has amnesty papers ready to ensure that Jean-Juste receives medical treatment immediately in the United States. Latortue expressed his frustration with Jean-Juste and his lawyers, calling them political activists who are doing all within their power to embarrass the interim government. He claims that they are dealing in bad faith, and that Jean-Juste would prefer to die in prison rather than give the government the chance to do the right thing. "We fight to do the right thing," said Latortue, "but we're made to look like the devil."

4. (C) Latortue stated that his meeting with PM Manning was a success, with Manning expressing strong support to bring Haiti back into the CARICOM fold. Latortue also stated that he will invite a CARICOM delegation to visit Haiti in the near future to set the stage for Haiti to rejoin CARICOM as early as July. He mentioned the upcoming CARICOM Foreign Ministers' meeting in Jamaica, and said that there is a possibility for the ministers to travel immediately from Kingston to Port au Prince to see for themselves Haiti's progress. Manning himself is committed to helping Haiti, but has difficulty mobilizing CARICOM due to the opposition of St. Lucia and St. Vincent.

5. (C) Manning and Latortue also discussed the possibility of bringing T&T private investment to Haiti. Specifically, they discussed involvement in the cement sector. T&T has already expressed interest in this sector, but lost a bid previously because their company would not pay bribes. Latortue reaffirmed that the only way to improve the quality of life in Haiti was through private sector involvement; an area that he intends to remain active in after the permanent, elected government is sworn in.

6. (C) Turning to what the U.S. could do to help, Latortue reiterated his idea for "psychological support" in the form of a naval vessel to be stationed near Haiti in the days before the election, with helicopters flying overhead to

emphasize U.S. support (reftel). Latortue believes this is necessary because the drug and weapons runners have the population running scared; a U.S. presence would serve to reassure the population and encourage them to vote on February 7. Ambassador likened Latortue's recommendation to the British colonial strategy of having naval vessels cruise within sight of citizens of countries that may have been contemplating insurrection. He advised that while the strategy may be effective, it may also backfire because some observers may interpret it as U.S. interference intended to influence the outcome of the election.

AUSTIN

=====CABLE ENDS=====